AsarahanS @AsarahanS 17 Feb 2021

I often cover frequently misused terminology on this website, so I figured I'd do it again! What is a plot device, and why does anime seem to call everything they don't like one? I spent a few hours researching this, so let's get into it!

[Thread]

Feb 17, 2021 · 7:54 PM UTC

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Plot device as a term has recently garnered a very strong negative connotation.

A plot device is defined as: Something material, an object, person, or something immaterial like a situation that moves a story forward.

That's... pretty broad, isn't it?

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It's when we see people criticize characters for being a plot device' they're actually correct. They are all used to move the plot forward, however, where we disagree is whether or not that is a CRITICISM.

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Under the generally agreed upon definition of plot device, isn't nearly everything a character does a plot device? Kind of, yes. Which means that using 'plot device' as a criticism holds no weight, as essential characters are plot devices, but not all plot devices are inherently bad.

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What are people USUALLY criticizing when they call something a plot device? There are a few things. Existing 'only' as a plot device, existing as a deus ex machina, existing to undo consequences, or having a flat character.

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In order to examine these claims, let's look at the character most frequently targeted with 'plot device' as a criticism. Eri!

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#1 She only exists as a plot device.

My conversation with this would be: all parts of a story should serve the purpose of progressing the plot. Progressing the plot is the most important part. So I would argue progressing the plot is THE reason for a character to exist.

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Not only that, but no matter how much you develop a character, you can not remove them from their role in the story. You would not criticize a protagonist for being a protagonist. Why would we criticize Eri for being a plot device?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?
I'M SORRY, ERI.
I'M SORRY.
I'M SORRY.
I'M SORRY